

# Connecticut Postsecondary Pathways for Opportunity Youth

American Youth Policy Forum



## *Overview*

With support from The C.S. Mott Foundation and the Tow Foundation, the American Youth Policy Forum documented pathways to postsecondary opportunities in the state of Connecticut for the most vulnerable youth\*<sup>1</sup> with a special focus on those involved in the juvenile justice system. Through our reporting, it is our hope that Connecticut's policymakers, advocates, and others will feel a renewed sense of focus and urgency to acknowledge and invest in this population with a deeper understanding of the options and challenges.

In this report, AYPF will present a portrait of the population and the barriers they face. From our conversations and site visits, we then provide a portrait of common evidence-based practices and structures contributing to the development of pathways to postsecondary opportunity. Our concluding sections articulate the role of state policy to continue to build and sustain pathways to postsecondary opportunities for these young people.

## *Pathways to Postsecondary Opportunities*

*Pathways to Postsecondary Opportunities are the range of options created across education institutions, training providers, and community-based organizations so that each and every young person can access the necessary and personally relevant credentials, skills, and training beyond the completion of a secondary credential that will propel him/her to long-term economic success and self-sufficiency.*

As our nation's economy continues to grow and evolve, it is predicted that by 2020 approximately 65% of all available jobs will require some postsecondary education or training.<sup>1</sup> While Connecticut's recovery after the most recent recession has lagged slightly behind the rest of the country, there are signs now of improvement and need for trained workers across a variety of

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\*<sup>1</sup> AYPF defines the older, vulnerable youth population to include young people aged 16-24 who are disengaged from education, workforce training, and career opportunities.

industries.<sup>2</sup> Yet, there are young people who are being excluded from these opportunities because they are not on a pathway that includes education and workforce training that will adequately prepare them for the jobs in Connecticut that will provide family-sustaining wages. For Connecticut's vulnerable youth population, pathways to postsecondary opportunity are limited and under developed. In service of Connecticut's most vulnerable youth, leaders must ensure they have "well lit" pathways into and through education to workforce training and careers.

## ***Population Overview***

In 2013, there were just over 490,000 youth ages 15 to 24 in Connecticut.<sup>3</sup> Many of these youth face barriers that make long-term success difficult. Young people who do not earn a secondary credential are more likely to be jobless, earn less money, have more family and relationship struggles, and become incarcerated as compared to youth who do earn a high school diploma.<sup>4</sup> Youth who go on to earn a postsecondary degree are not only better off in these categories, but are also less likely to live in poverty than high school dropouts.<sup>5</sup> Youth who drop out of high school are less likely to have maintained long-term employment by age 22 than youth with more education.<sup>6</sup> Young people have increased chances of becoming disconnected if they face disciplinary difficulties in school, have experience with the juvenile justice system, are in foster care, come from impoverished homes, are homeless, or have parents that have not earned a high school degree.

## ***Opportunity Youth***

Opportunity Youth – sometimes referred to as "disconnected youth" – are defined as people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. Out of the 38.9 million Americans who fall into the 16 – 24 age range, about 6.7 million can be described as Opportunity Youth. These young men and women represent a social and economic opportunity: many of them are eager to further their education, gain work experience, and help their communities. Failure to invest in the future of these youth means 6.7 million missed opportunities across the United States.

The term "Opportunity Youth" has recently been adopted by many youth organizations (see [Opportunity Nation Coalition](#)) focused on the promise and opportunity of reconnecting the older, vulnerable youth population. The older, vulnerable youth of Connecticut represent the state's Opportunity Youth. These young people struggle to complete a secondary credential, continue on

to earn a postsecondary certificate or degree, and find a stable career. However, there are many opportunities for these young people to find pathways to success despite their barriers.

# CONNECTICUT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

**12%**

of young adults age 18-24 were not in school, not working, and had no degree beyond high school in 2012.<sup>1</sup>

**17%**

of all youth age 16-24 were unemployed in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

**10,000**

teens age 16-19 were not attending school and not working in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

**38,673**

youth age 18-24 completed part of high school but did not receive a diploma in 2013.<sup>4</sup>

**73%**

of students who enrolled in community college directly from high school were recommended for developmental math, English, or both in 2010.<sup>5</sup>

**54%**

of first-time undergrads returned for their second year for fall of 2010 at two-year schools.<sup>6</sup>

1. Kidscount.datacenter.org: Persons Age 18 to 24 Not Attending School, Not Working, And No Degree Beyond High School

2. Governing.com: Youth Unemployment Rate, Figures by State

3. Kidscount.datacenter.org: Teens 16 To 19 Not In School And Not Working

4. U.S. Census Bureau: Table B15001 (Connecticut)

5. CT State Colleges and Universities: Remedial and Developmental Education

6. HigherEdInfo.org: Retention Rates-First-Time College Freshman Returning Their Second Year

# CONNECTICUT: POTENTIAL BARRIERS



## School Discipline

**15%**

of high school students received in-school and out-of-school suspensions, and/or expulsions in school year 2011-2012.<sup>1</sup>



## Juvenile Justice

**9%**

of the arrests made in 2013 were young people under age 18.<sup>2</sup>



## Foster Care Youth

**31%**

of youth in the foster care system were age 16-20 in 2012.<sup>3</sup>



## Poverty

**16%**

of youth age 16-24 lived below the poverty line in 2013.<sup>4</sup>



## Homelessness

**661**

students in grades 9-12 were reported as being homeless in school year 2012-2013.<sup>5</sup>



## Parental Credential

**8%**

of youth under 18 were part of a household where the head lacked a high school credential in 2012.<sup>6</sup>

1. Connecticut State Department of Education: Suspensions and Expulsions in Connecticut

2. Connecticut Office of Policy and Management: Arrests in Connecticut: Trend Analysis

3. Kidscount.datacenter.org: Children In Foster Care By Age Group

4. U.S. Census Bureau: Table B17001

5. U.S. Department of Education: Consolidated State Performance Report

6. Kidscount.datacenter.org: Children In Families Where The Household Head Lacks A High School Diploma By Race And Ethnicity

## *Barriers*

Supporting youth through transition points along the continuum of education and development is important. There are several areas along this continuum where youth in Connecticut face barriers to success, outlined below.

### *School Discipline*

- When students are suspended and/or expelled from school, they spend less time in class, putting them “off track” to educational attainment.<sup>7</sup>
- There is a clear pathway that leads from suspension and/or expulsion to dropping out of school and increased likelihood of involvement with the criminal justice system.
- Zero tolerance policies like suspension and expulsion that were once reserved for the most serious, violent offenses are now sometimes used to remove students from the learning environment for minor infractions. This can range from excessive talking to disrespect, as defined by the teacher.
- Minority students and students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the over use of suspensions and expulsions. African American students are suspended at a rate three times higher than their peers. Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be disciplined for the same offense as their peers.<sup>8</sup>

### *Juvenile Justice*

- Once a young person comes into contact with the juvenile justice system, he or she faces increased and more pronounced obstacles to postsecondary education and workforce opportunities:
  - Interruptions in education
  - Difficulty finding employment because of a criminal record, and
  - Limited access to social networks and community systems that are essential to completing education, job training, and finding employment.
- States are often ill-equipped to track recidivism and outcomes of youth who are involved with the justice system.
- States need additional capacity in order to be able to use data to effectively address recurring problems that land a young person back in the juvenile justice system.<sup>9</sup>

- Programs and services are most effective when they are evidence-based, able to treat youth as assets to be nurtured, not deficits to be punished, and engage the individual's family as an additional resource on the pathway to reentry and postsecondary opportunities.<sup>10</sup>

## *Youth in Foster Care*

- Older youth in the foster care system face unique challenges as they transition into adulthood, as they are more likely to experience homelessness, unemployment, and mental health challenges because they lack a social support network.
- Nationwide, the college enrollment and completion rates for youth from foster care are well below their peers – less than 10% obtain a college degree.<sup>11</sup>
- Less than 35 percent of youth involved with the foster care system are employed by age 24 and these youth typically earn less than their peers.<sup>12</sup>
- Most states offer extended benefits, like health insurance and education vouchers, to youth from foster care; however, information about these benefits is often not shared with young people, or with those who work with them.

## *Poverty*

- Poverty has negative effects on children and youth at multiple points in their development and education, including abuse and neglect, behavioral and socio-emotional problems, developmental delays, physical health problems, and poor academic achievement, which can all lead to dropping out of school.<sup>13</sup>
- Those living in poverty are less likely to finish a secondary degree and more likely to receive public assistance as adults, receive more public assistance in later life, and experience adverse health outcomes.
- In school, children and youth who come from families living below the poverty line perform consistently below average on assessments of vocabulary, reading, and mathematics. This is in part due to chronic stress associated with living in poverty, which negatively affects children's concentration and memory.<sup>14</sup>
- There is a strong correlation between high school students from poor households and performance on the SAT; students living below the poverty line are more likely to score in the lowest percentile.
- Students who grew up in poverty are least likely to enroll in and complete a college education.<sup>15</sup>

## *Homeless Youth*

- “Homelessness” can look different for different young people. For some, this means spending several weeks in a shelter, while others may sleep in their car or “couch surf” with no permanent address.
- Without a safe, stable place to call home, youth trying to complete education or work face many obstacles such as hunger, poor physical and mental health, and lack of school consistency.
- Homeless children and youth often have interrupted and delayed schooling and are twice as likely to have a learning disability, repeat a grade, or to be suspended from school.<sup>16</sup>
- A quarter of homeless children have witnessed violence, which often leads to a number of emotional (anxiety, depression, withdrawal, etc.) and behavioral (acting out, aggression, etc.) psychosocial difficulties.<sup>17</sup>
- Increased exposure to trauma often leads youth to run away and become homeless. Forty-six percent of homeless youth left because of physical abuse, and 17% left due to sexual abuse.<sup>18</sup>
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth are the most vulnerable<sup>19</sup> and make up 40% of homeless teens.<sup>20</sup>
- Homelessness is associated with poor physical health for children, including malnutrition, ear infections, exposure to environmental toxins, and chronic illnesses such as asthma. They are also less likely than their peers to have adequate access to medical and dental care.<sup>21</sup>

## *Parents Educational Status*

- Navigating high school graduation and postsecondary opportunities is difficult when you are the first and only person in your family to do so.
- Research shows that the lower a parent’s educational attainment, the less likely their child is to continue his or her education past high school.
- Higher parental education is linked to parents providing a more stimulating physical, cognitive, and emotional home environment, as well as more accurate beliefs about their children’s actual achievement.<sup>22</sup>

*In spite of these barriers, many youth are able to achieve success in part due to the multiple pathways to education, training, and careers that Connecticut provides.*



## Juvenile Reentry: A Critical Point on the Pathway to Postsecondary Opportunities

*The following information is a closer look at the justice-involved population in the state of Connecticut.*

In 2013, 10,200 youth between the ages of 10 and 17 were arrested in Connecticut.<sup>23</sup> What happens to these young people when their involvement with the juvenile justice system is over? For many, accessing pathways to postsecondary opportunities becomes especially difficult. Involvement with the justice system results in interruptions in education, a significantly decreased likelihood of finding employment, and limited opportunities for social mobility.

For over 20 years leaders in Connecticut have long been involved in efforts to reform the state's juvenile justice system, catalyzed through a combination of state policy, advocacy, and local action. In addition to advocates such as Connecticut's Voices for Children and the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance, state-level officials and committees like the Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee have worked to transform the state's juvenile justice system. Since the early 1990's, Connecticut has implemented several major reforms including:

- Reductions in the number of juvenile out-of-home placements,<sup>24</sup>
- Legislation that addresses school-based arrests for non-violent behavior, and a subsequent reduction in school-based referrals to the juvenile justice system,<sup>25</sup>
- Increased investment in evidence-based services for juvenile offenders such as behavioral therapy, substance abuse treatment, and counseling services,<sup>26</sup>
- A successful compromise to "raise the age" of juvenile jurisdiction to 18, fully implemented in 2012.<sup>27</sup>
- Recent momentum to reduce disproportionate minority contact (DMC) in the juvenile justice system, deinstitutionalize status offenders, and separate juveniles from adults in locked facilities.<sup>28</sup>

These reforms have been focused on improving the conditions of youth when they become involved with the system, as well as measures to prevent involvement with the system in the first place. There is still a need, however, to improve the outcomes of young people when they leave the justice system by strengthening state and local supports for reentry.

### *Connecticut's Preventative Efforts: School Discipline Reform*

Connecticut has also invested resources to prevent school-based behavior incidents from leading to referrals to the justice system and arrests. By reforming policy within the juvenile justice system,

changing school-based practices, and creating opportunities for stakeholders across systems to collaborate, Connecticut has significantly reduced its school-based arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system. By 2011, in-school arrest rates decreased approximately 50-59% in schools that participated in the state's School-Based Diversion Initiative.<sup>29</sup>

## *The Need to Address Youth Outcomes and Reentry Opportunities*

While these efforts to prevent and reduce system involvement are necessary and positive steps to keep youth on a pathway to postsecondary success, leaders, advocates, and policymakers cannot overlook the critical point of reentry. Many reentry efforts across the nation focus on reducing recidivism. Although reducing recidivism is part of reentry for all youth involved in the justice system, successful reentry should also encourage a transition to other opportunities and outcomes as well. Regardless of a young person's type of involvement with the justice system (out-of-home placement, probation, custody of DCF, etc) stakeholders must do more to ensure successful reentry to school, work, and community.

Research shows that successful reentry policies and programs should engage youth early in the reentry planning process, be community-based, facilitate opportunities to continue education and employment, and include connections to a wide range of transitional services like housing assistance, financial planning, and counseling.<sup>30</sup>

### *Model Reentry Programs*

Several localities and programs throughout Connecticut are already considering ways to connect youth involved with the justice system to postsecondary pathways through effective reentry services. The programs listed below highlight the importance of engaging youth involved in the justice system, building a relationship with them to guide them through the reentry process, and providing them access to opportunities that further their education and career options.

## *LifeBridge Community Services*

LifeBridge Community Services (formerly Bridgeport FSW) is a 165-year old social service organization. They provides a range of services, including juvenile reentry supports. LifeBridge contracts with the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) to work with youth involved in the justice system, and 100 percent of the youth they serve are referred to them from DCF. LifeBridge begins engaging youth early, while they are still involved with the system in order to provide seamless reentry services. They emphasize connecting youth who have been system-involved to work-based learning experiences and providing them with job training opportunities and skills in addition to continuing

educational opportunities. Youth are engaged with many adults and staff members who specialize in different phases of their reentry, including case workers and employment coaches. These adult advisors act as liaisons between young people and the community, assessing the needs of youth as they reenter their communities and building partnerships with businesses and community service providers to ensure continuing opportunities for youth.

### *Domus*

Domus opened its doors in 1972 as a group home for boys. A Latin noun for “home,” Domus has served at-risk and vulnerable youth through education, community, and residential programs. Domus believes in “creating the conditions necessary for youth to get on a path toward health and opportunity...” During FY 2012-2013, Domus served a total of 929 unduplicated youth through educational, community, and residential programs in Stamford and Fairfield.<sup>31</sup>

The Trafigura Work and Learn Business Center is part of the Domus Community programs. Work and Learn teaches youth ages 16-25 who are in need of pathway opportunities, such as youth who have been involved with the justice system. The Work and Learn program operates on a 12-week cycle, teaching young people soft skills (such as shaking hands, timeliness, etc.) as well as vocational skills (such as small engine repair, bicycle repair, woodworking, food preparation, and hair and nails). Youth are paid for their participation in the program, and 25 percent return for additional learning cycles. Work and Learn relies on partnerships between Domus, the Trafigura Foundation, and the Tow Foundation to operate. Staff members also build relationships with the community and other youth professionals such as probation officers in order to advertise the program. Many students who complete the Work and Learn program refer their friends. In 2013, the program served 132 students, reported a 95% attendance and graduation rate, and boasted over 50 students who went on to secure employment.<sup>32</sup>



## *Elements for Success*

Through our investigation of the pathways to postsecondary opportunity for Opportunity Youth in place in Connecticut, we identified four elements necessary for pathways creation. These elements align with research-supported best practices of what is needed for all youth to connect and succeed in postsecondary opportunities and address both the practices at the individual level and the organizations of systems and structures that make up a network for diverse and personalizable pathways into postsecondary opportunities. These common elements include knowledgeable and caring staff, youth voice and ownership, connecting learning and work, and building an infrastructure for collaboration.

### *Knowledgeable & Caring Staff*

Relationships matter in youth development, especially for youth who have experienced adverse circumstances. Programs that facilitate one-on-one interactions between youth and a caring, supportive adult mentor are essential complements to other support systems. Additionally, adults placed with vulnerable youth should be highly qualified to respond to the complex issues these young people might be dealing with – psychologically, physically, and emotionally. Relationships that are cultivated on the pathway to postsecondary success should be long-term.

### *Bridgeport Family Reentry*

For 25 years, Family Reentry (FRE) in Bridgeport has provided services and attention to incarcerated and recently released youth and adults. Through the J-Connect program youth ages 6-17 in Bridgeport, Norwalk, and Stamford who are currently on Juvenile Probation for low-level offenses are served. Youth are referred to J-Connect from Court Services. Program staff provide one-on-one support and mentoring to youth and services are guided by participation in the CT Juvenile Justice Mentoring Network.<sup>33</sup>

Relationships between program staff and young people in the program are critical to successful experiences and outcomes. Mentors are able to recall every detail about a young person – not just his or her reason for being on probation, but obstacles they face at home, school, and relationships. Mentors are often the people who help young people identify a problem and navigate resources to solve that problem. Working together and accessing community-based services, mentors and youth plan the reentry process – everything from educational planning to job searches and relationship-building with family and peers.<sup>34</sup>

### *Youth Development Specialists at Our Piece of the Pie*

Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) is “a youth development agency offering a relationship-centered approach to help young people access and attain a mix of the educational, employment, and personal skills that contribute to their success”.<sup>35</sup> When a young person enters OPP, he or she is connected with a Youth Development Specialist (YDS). YDS implement the relationship-centered

model that has contributed to the success of OPP. Moreover, YDS take a proactive approach to connecting with young people, many of whom face barriers to postsecondary success. YDS invest in relationships with youth through mentoring and planning, as well as coach young people on how to overcome barriers and connect to resources within the community. This dual role of YDS – mentor and resource navigator – contributes to the success rate of OPP students and youth. YDS are an integral part of OPP’s strategy, which has yielded positive outcomes. Eighty-two percent of students complete high school (compared to a local completion rate of 65% in Hartford, CT). Of OPP youth, 77% go on to postsecondary education, including an Associate’s, Bachelor’s, or Vocational Training program.<sup>36</sup>

## *Youth Voice and Ownership*

Cultivating youth voice and ownership in the process of reconnection is essential to success. Too often youth have a process done *to* them; instead, young adults should be seen as partners in the planning process.<sup>37</sup> Counselors, programs, and systems should build opportunities for youth to provide input and feedback, and guide their pathway to postsecondary education and the workforce.

### *Connecticut’s Youth Service Bureaus*

Established in 1978, Connecticut’s Youth Service Bureaus (YSB) were established to “be the coordinating unit of community-based services to provide comprehensive delivery of prevention, intervention, treatment and follow-up services.”<sup>38</sup>

YSB are under the authority of the Department of Education, which reports on their progress annually.

YSB offer two types of services. Tier 1 services are preventative in nature and include short workshops or large assemblies and demonstrations aimed at providing positive youth development (such as a mock car crash). Tier 2 services are intervention programs designed to divert youth from the juvenile justice system. These programs include Juvenile Review Boards, employment training, life skills training, and case management. Youth may also be referred for mental health services and counseling. Coordination of these services is done at the local level, where YSB are administered. YSB programs give youth an opportunity to engage in decisions about their well-being.

Since 2009 several agencies in Connecticut, including the Department of Education, have used Results-Based Accountability (RBA) as a way of holding conversations about program accountability and outcomes between the General Assembly and state agencies.<sup>39</sup> Youth surveys are an important component of RBA for the Department of Education in Connecticut. These surveys document the experiences of over 600 young people who enter YSB prevention and intervention programs in 142 towns across Connecticut.<sup>40</sup> Including youth voice through surveys validates the experiences of young people as important to the decision-making process.

Results from the most recent youth survey component of YSB RBA are highlighted below:

- 15,463 youth across were referred to local YSB during the 2012-2013 program year.
- Referral sources included schools, parents, other youth, police, social service agencies, Juvenile Review Board, and the Department of Children and Families.
- The most common reasons for referral were positive youth development programming, school issues, non-school issues, delinquent behavior, and parenting/family issues.
- The most prevalent services were afterschool programming, individual counseling, and positive youth development.
- Youth who completed YSB programming indicated the most satisfaction with program management, and the least satisfaction with program impact on personal outcomes.

This data reveals important trends about youth experiences and attitudes towards programs that are designed to improve their outcomes.

## *Connecting Learning and Work*

Aligned with giving youth a voice and a choice in the creation of personalized pathways to postsecondary opportunities is the need to provide learning experiences aligned with “on-the-job” application. From the vast research base, we know that young people are more likely to be engaged and retain information if they understand its usefulness in future situations, especially jobs.<sup>41</sup> Research also points to employer involvement as a critical component of creating highly effective programs that demonstrate the application of knowledge and skills to the real world, either through teacher training opportunities, curriculum development, and/or internship opportunities.<sup>42</sup>

For Opportunity Youth who often have been unsuccessful in traditional educational programs, the ability to quickly learn a skill or trade to gain employment is often the hook that brings them back into a program. Often employment training programs are the gateway back into degree-granting educational programs and subsequently long-term success.

## *Pathways to Manufacturing Initiative, Our Piece of the Pie and Asnuntuck Community College*

With the assistance from Capital Workforce Partners (the local Workforce Investment Board), Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) has partnered with Asnuntuck Community College to create the Pathways to Manufacturing Initiative (PMI) for Opportunity Youth interested in careers in Advanced Manufacturing.

The cornerstone of all of OPP’s programs is the relationship developed between a young person and their Youth Development Specialist (YDS), who serves both as a counselor/life coach and provides guidance in navigating the myriad of programs and services available at OPP and through its partnerships (as described in previous section). OPP programs operate both within schools and community colleges as well as in community-based settings with the goals of offering the

training, skills-building, support, and assistance needed to continue on a pathway to long-term success through completion of education and employment milestones (degrees, certificates, credentials, and employment). PMI is one of OPP's many programs that utilize the range of resources at OPP and Asnuntuck to ensure young people gain the full range of skills and abilities to be successful in the workplace.

Participant youth are selected from any of OPP's programs and must have completed or be working towards a secondary credential. PMI students are transported daily from OPP's offices in Hartford to Asnuntuck's campus in Enfield. Through coursework at Asnuntuck, PMI students receive a combination of classroom instruction, computer training, and hands-on experience in the state-of-the art manufacturing labs working towards either a one-year certificate or two-year degree alongside other students in Asnuntuck's Manufacturing Technology Programs. Most PMI students also participate in an internship with a local employer, which leads to a job and employer support for the completion of the postsecondary credential. All students participate in classes and training approximately 30-35 hours a week as an effort to get them accustomed to the rigors of the work week, according to Frank Gulluni, Director, Manufacturing Technology at Asnuntuck.

In addition to working towards a certificate or degree at Asnuntuck, PMI participants also complete a Career Competency Development Training taught by an OPP Workforce Development Specialist, which includes three industry recognized credentials (Work Readiness, Customer Service, and OHSA). Continuing OPP's cornerstone relationship strategy, PMI students have access to an OPP staff member based on campus, available to assist with navigating the college services or any other needed supports.

Through combining variety forms of instruction and "on-the-job" experiences, PMI success rates are promising. Since the program's inception last spring, nine participants have earned a credential from Asnuntuck with 24 students still in progress. PMI participants are typically hired during their internship, and employers are pleased to find trained workers with both technical skills and the desired traits of a collaborative employee.

### ***Infrastructure for Collaboration***

The aforementioned elements that focus on practice are critical to building comprehensive pathways. Yet, the programs highlighted articulated the need to develop and evolve in response to local community needs. At the individual level, the organizations serving high-risk youth excel at leveraging the resources within communities and remaining flexible to local evolving needs. This nimbleness has aided in the development and refinement of pathways to postsecondary opportunities that seamlessly tie together many organizations and systems, creating the necessary infrastructure for sustained collaboration.

### ***Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative***

For more than 10 years, Hartford, through the leadership of Capital Workforce Partners (the local Workforce Investment Board), has directed resources to building pathways to educational and job



training opportunities for the most vulnerable youth within its community through supporting a range of individual providers that create personalized opportunities for the diverse Opportunity Youth population of Hartford. In the spring of 2013, with leadership from the Mayor, this commitment was solidified through the creation of the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC). At its inception more than 20 organizations, city and state government agencies, education institutions, and community-based organizations, signed a memorandum of understanding organizing across the city through city agencies and community-based partners to direct resources and build partnerships to ensure Opportunity Youth had pathways to postsecondary opportunities. Using the collective impact strategy that requires a common agenda, aligned efforts, and common measures of success, HOYC is focusing on:

- Implementing a career pathway system that meets youth where they are regardless of age, place, situation, or level of preparedness;
- Using a Results-Based Accountability (RBA) framework so that youth achieve educational success become employed and self-sufficient;
- Empowering youth leaders to advise, advocate, and lead solutions for themselves, their peers, and their community; and
- Advocating for supportive policies to overcome barriers and promote alignment and integration.<sup>43</sup>

Given the past focus on Opportunity Youth, HOYC is strengthening the capacity of a range of entities to more effectively serve Opportunity Youth by insuring the infrastructure of collaboration is built to last. Their dual strategy to develop the abilities within each entity to build pathways to postsecondary opportunity and work across the city to break down barriers to coordination, so that the pathways are surrounded by the needed supportive services to ensure success for all young people.

## ***Recommendations for Connecticut***

In communities across Connecticut, AYPF has been able to document postsecondary pathways for Opportunity Youth. Our recommendations focus on the role of the state in supporting, sustaining, and growing the efforts of programs and communities. These recommendations consider the role of the state to broadly include elected leadership, state agencies, and statewide organizations.

## *Understanding the Opportunity Youth Population*

In this brief, AYPF has begun to describe the diversity and needs of the Opportunity Youth population. This includes calculating (using available national data) the number of young people who are considered Opportunity Youth and defining some common barriers associated with inability to access and be successful in postsecondary pathways. There is still work to be done in understanding the Opportunity Youth population in Connecticut and the state is uniquely positioned to guide this work.

In this brief, we have defined barriers from a variety of different system perspectives such as education, child welfare, justice, poverty; yet we recognize these are not the only barriers young people face on their pathway to long-term success. Due to limited availability of national data, AYPF was not able to consider health or mental health issues (e.g. substance abuse), yet data from state agencies can be made available to consider those needs of the population. More importantly, even through de-identified individual records, one can gain information about number and percentage of young people who are involved with/in multiple systems. Although we have seen good data sharing efforts across many agencies (Department of Children and Families, Division of Court Support Services, and the Department of Education), there remain additional systems that can help provide a more clear understanding of overlapping needs.

Through building a comprehensive data portrait of the Opportunity Youth population and the barriers they face, stakeholders in Connecticut will be able to have a more robust conversation about the needs of these young people. In addition, this information can be valuable in driving conversations about investment of resources both at the systems-level (in particular agencies) as well as regional.

## *Map the programs and efforts across the states that serve Opportunity Youth*

In this brief, AYPF has begun to catalogue some of the programs doing this work across Connecticut, yet we recognize there are many more. While there have been some efforts by some state agencies to list programs available for young people with different system involved (see the menu of services at DCF), these are not comprehensive. In addition, the current menus often look only at services to fill a specific need (i.e. job training programs) rather than comprehensively look at programs across many agencies and needs.

With a more complete understanding of the range of programs available to Opportunity Youth, it is possible for state agencies to undertake an effort to build capacity. For example, state agencies

could organize professional learning communities to share ideas and best practices across providers working with Opportunity Youth. Along with the more detailed information about the needs and location of the Opportunity Youth population, state agencies could guide providers with specific strengths to high-need communities.

## *Create the culture of collaboration*

Once there is clarity around the resources to support work with the Opportunity Youth population, state agencies must model the collaboration necessary at the program and community level. Agencies need to break down the barriers, both actual and perceived, and view each other as partners and collaborators. There can no longer be rhetoric of collaboration, but rather there must be a culture of collaboration where information is regularly shared with the intent of working toward the same goals. Leadership is critical to building the capacity for cross-agency collaboration. Agency leaders must both communicate regularly with each other and create spaces to discuss how agencies can work together.

## *Collaboration through Data Sharing*

A starting point for building collaborative relationship can be creating mechanisms for regular data access and sharing, especially for this population who is often served by multiple systems. It is clear that the technological ability exists to link information across systems. Recognizing there still needs to be privacy safeguards; information sharing can lead to a more robust profile of a young person and better coordination of services and supports. Because the development of pathways to postsecondary opportunity involve transitions through a number of youth-serving systems, it would be valuable be able to have access to services provided by other systems (e.g. does the juvenile justice system have information from the Department of Education about a young person's individualized education plan (IEP) to be able to provide appropriate services and support during detention?).

Previous AYPF documentation efforts have lead to the understanding that a complete profile of a young person is extremely valuable to the front-line staff working to create an individualized pathway.<sup>44</sup> Some programs have built the capacity to feed multiple data sources into their data system, but building this infrastructure can be expensive, thus making it available through data systems available through the state would provide greater access to programs and their staff.

## *Build the infrastructure to work at the intersection of multiple systems*

Another critical capacity building role for the state is to provide useful and relevant information that will allow more cross-agency collaboration and make it easier for providers to work within and across multiple systems. The coordinated data sharing as described above is one aspect of the necessary infrastructure, but AYPF has identified that eligibility and outcome reporting related to funding is another aspect where clear and coordinated information across systems would improve the ability of providers to work at the intersection of multiple systems. State agencies can clarify and simplify eligibility requirements across funding streams at the federal and state level.

Recognizing that there are unique eligibility requirements for different federal funding sources, state agencies can help articulate the requirements and proof of eligibility across the main sources of support that serve the Opportunity Youth population (e.g. WIOA, ABE, Chafee, etc).<sup>45</sup> Related, state agencies can clearly communicate the necessary reporting by funding stream and determine common outcomes to make reporting streamlined for providers. In particular aligning outcome reporting between federal and state funding sources would be extremely valuable and time efficient. This would provide significant clarity to the field and also help provide a clear sense of how best to blend and braid funding to build comprehensive pathways and services for these young people facing multiple barriers to success.

## *Conclusion*

In order to be most responsive to individual and community needs, there is no prescriptive methodology to build pathways to postsecondary opportunities, especially when you consider the barriers outlined here facing Opportunity Youth. Yet there is a unique opportunity for Connecticut to facilitate efforts to build and sustain postsecondary pathways for Opportunity Youth.

## Appendix 1: Opportunity Youth Details

<u>Opportunity Youth</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Connecticut</u>		<u>United States</u>		<u>Data Description</u>	<u>More Information</u>	<u>Source</u>
<b>Not in School, Not Working, and No Degree Beyond High School (ages 18-24)</b>	2012	12%	41,000	16%	5,044,000	Young adults age 18-24 who were not attending school, were not working, and had no degree beyond high school.		Kids Count Data Center: Persons Age 18 To 24 Not Attending School, Not Working, And No Degree Beyond High School
<b>Unemployed (ages 16-24)</b>	2012	17%	-	16.1% (April 2013)	-	Youth age 16-24 who were unemployed in 2012 in the states; US data is from April 2013.	Unemployment breakdown of youth age 16-19 and 20-24 available for states.	Governing Data: Youth Unemployment Rate, Figures by State (BLS Data)
<b>Not in School and Not Working (ages 16-19)</b>	2013	5%	10,000	8%	1,347,000	Teenagers age 16-19 who were not attending school and not working.	Congressional District breakdown available.	Kids Count Data Center: Teens 16 To 19 Not In School And Not Working
<b>High School Dropout (ages 18-24)</b>	2013	11.20%	38,673	12.88%	4,072,844	Youth age 18-24 who completed part of high school but did not receive a diploma.	Sex is available in addition to more breakdowns in age and education attainment.	Census 2013 ACS: Table B15001
<b>Post-Secondary Students in Need of Remediation</b>	2010	73.01%	5,148			<u>CONNECTICUT:</u> Percentage and number of CT students who graduated high school in Spring 2010 and were placed in CT Community College System that fall who were recommended for developmental math, English, or both.	<u>CONNECTICUT:</u> School specific data is available, as is information on four-year colleges/universities. All information regards CT high school students enrolled in CT community colleges or four-year colleges/universities.	Connecticut State Colleges and Universities: Remedial and Developmental Education
	SY 2011-2012			15.80%	-	<u>UNITED STATES:</u> Percentage of first- and second-year undergraduates who reported taking courses in 2011-12 at any institution (public, private nonprofit, for-profit, less than two-year, two-year, and four-year).	<u>UNITED STATES:</u> Attendance intensity, class level, sex, race/ethnicity, dependency status, age, income group, highest education attained by either parent, disability status, and worked while enrolled data is available.	NCES: Profile of Undergraduate Students: 2011-12, Table 6.2 (Remedial Coursetaking)

# CT OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

<b>Second Year Retention Rate (two-year schools)</b>	<i>Fall 2010</i>	54.4%	6,227	54.3%	758,822	Total retention rate of first time students in Fall 2010, and students from the total adjusted fall 2009 cohort enrolled in fall 2010 at two-year schools.	Attendance type and breakdowns about two-year, four-year, public, private, nonprofit, and for-profit are available.	NCHEMS Information Center: Retention Rates - First-Time College Freshmen Returning Their Second Year for Two-Year Total in 2010
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## Appendix 2: Potential Barriers Details

Potential Barriers	Year	Connecticut		United States		Data Description	More Information	Source
Suspended & Expelled (grades 9-12 or K-12)	SY 2011-2012	14.8%	-			CONNECTICUT: The suspension/expulsion rate for students in grades 9-12.		CT State Department of Education: Suspensions and Expulsions in Connecticut (p. 21)
	SY 2009-2010			-	5,546,735	UNITED STATES: The number of instances of in-school/out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions in K-12 public schools (without disabilities).	UNITED STATES: Data on type of expulsions and suspensions, and students with disabilities available.	2009 Civil Rights Data Collection: Estimated Values for United States
Juvenile Justice (ages 10-17)	2013	9%	10,200	-	875,262	Number of juvenile population, youth ages 10-17, who were arrested. For Connecticut, the percent reflects percent of arrests that were committed by juveniles.	CONNECTICUT: Breakdowns of age, type of offense, referrals, juvenile court district, and detention are available.	Connecticut Office of Policy and Management: Arrests in Connecticut: Trend Analysis
Foster Care Youth (ages 16-20)	2012	31%	1,409	19%	73,900	Amount of youth age 16-20 who represent part of the foster care system.		Kids Count Data Center: Children in Foster Care by Age Group
Poverty (ages 16-24)	2013	15.56%	59,761	23.95%	8,770,993	Youth age 16-24 who live below the poverty line.	Age breakdown of 16-17 and 18-24 available, as is sex.	Census 2013 ACS: Table B17001
Homeless (grades 9-12)	SY 2012-2013	-	661	-	317,081	Number of public school students in grades 9-12 who reported being homeless during the school year.	State testing achievement available.	Consolidated State Performance Report Parts I & II: Table 1.9.1.1 Homeless Children & Youths (states) & Table 8 (USA)
Parents Without a High School Diploma (under age 18)	2012	8%	62,000	15%	10,887,000	Young people under age 18 who are part of a family where the household head lacks a high school diploma or equivalent.	Race and ethnicity available.	Kids Count Data Center: Children In Families Where The Household Head Lacks a High School Diploma By Race And Ethnicity

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<sup>13</sup> "Effects of Poverty, Hunger and Homelessness on Children and Youth." American Psychological Association, Accessed September 3, 2014. <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/poverty.aspx>.

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